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*Killing for Pleasure*¹

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Preamble: This paper formulates and defends a version of moral vegetarianism. Since eating animals is not causally connected to their death, I begin with analyzing the moral status of consumer actions that do not, taken on their own, harm animals (I). I then formulate a version of moral vegetarianism (II). Three different opponents of moral vegetarianism are then distinguished and criticized (III-VI). I then take up the argument according to which eating animals benefits them (VII). I close with the question of the desirability of collective vegetarianism from the point of view of animals.

The negligible impact of individual action on large scale industries presents a problem for moral vegetarianism: since personally refraining from eating animal flesh will not save a single animal, endorsing personal vegetarianism does not follow from a belief in the immorality of killing animals for food, or a belief in the morality of collective vegetarianism. Pro-vegetarians bridge this gap either by arguing that personal action may affect large scale outcome (the analogy being voting: negligible impact is overwhelmingly likely; yet overwhelming impact is a possibility that justifies personal action), or by arguing that consuming products that are made through immoral actions

¹ I wish to thank Shuli Barzilai, Stan Godlovitch, Nathan Nobis, Daniel Statman and Eddy Zemach for comments and various challenges to previous versions of this paper.

exemplifies the wrong kind of virtue (obtuseness, callousness, cruelty), or by emphasizing symbolic support and symbolic protest.²

Opponents of vegetarianism will avoid formulating this problem as a critique of vegetarianism since if one accepts the “Voter’s Paradox” reasoning here—a reasoning according to which the benefits of a large scale desired action are causally detached from personal action—one is opening a Pandora box. Tax paying, cooperating with a draft, personal charitable aid to large-scale goals which one endorses, all become irrational. The challenge for vegetarian theory is here not one of answering a critique, but of clarifying the connection between consumption and killing when one’s own actions cannot modify outcome for future animals.³ General connections between personal action and promoting a desirable goal are one type of account that comes to mind. Eddy Zemach, a moral vegetarian, tells me that for him, fairness is the notion doing the work here (reducing the killing of animals is one’s goal and doing one’s fair share in promoting this goal means avoiding eating flesh). Zemach is partly right: such appeal to fairness is a conceptual link that operates in numerous cases in which the personal and the collective are linked. But I think that we can get closer to the particularities that distinguish the vegetarian example. Eating flesh, if one believes that it is collectively wrong, is not merely a case of not doing one’s fair share. Nor is the problem merely one of flawed integrity (which may be another suggestion regarding what is doing the moral work⁴).

Apart from fairness and integrity, which do partly underlie personal action here, there is an additional particular link that distinguishes refraining from meat eating. The most promising route to get at the specific moral structure which connects killing animals and meat consumption is Curnutt’s attempts to relate to the killing and the consumption as two parts of the same wrong.⁵ Curnutt defends this idea through the principle that it is

² Nathan Nobis surveys these routes in his “Vegetarianism and Virtue: Does Consequentialism Demand too Little?”, *Social Theory and Practice*, 28. 1. (2002): 135-156.

³ Some vegetarians believe that their diet personally diminishes the amount of animals killed. While I regard this as erroneous wishful thinking, the following argument on a deeper connection between consumption and killing is consistent with holding that the vegetarian is also personally effecting animal welfare.

⁴ Daniel Statman suggested to me that integrity and dis-integrity may be the important aspects here.

⁵ Jordan Curnutt, “A New Argument for Vegetarianism”, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 28 (1997): 153-72. Thomas Regan’s speaks of meat eaters being “causally implicated” in a wrong, but does not discuss the special nature of the causal link in his “The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism”, *All That Dwells Within*, University of California Press: Berkeley (1982) 1-39.

wrong to cooperate and benefit from a defeat of the basic well being of others. This principle explains the wrongness of consumption by tying it with the harm done to the animal. But the bond is actually tighter than benefiting or cooperating. It comes out when focusing on the philosophy of action implied by Curnutt's "two parts of the same wrong". Unfortunately, pro-vegetarian literature has here relied on misleading analogies between eating animals and using human remains that have been turned into objects (favorite examples are using soap or lamps made out of the remains of Jewish victims of the Nazis, or finding and wearing a ring made of human bone). Instrumental usage of human body parts is a symbolic demeaning of a person after death. Jews were not killed to produce soap. The wrong in using such "objects" involves a participation in demeaning a person. Such horrid examples also involve disgust, the moral status of which is complex: disgust is itself an amoral psychological fact that carries moral implications.⁶ Using animal for food is different. Pleasure rather than disgust is experienced. Another difference is that animals are also not perceived as being demeaned by using them for the purpose of producing food, clothing or footwear.

Better analogies that get us to the operating moral depth structure are watching snuff movies, or enjoying art that involves body parts (Melanesian head decoration). Victims of snuff movies (I will assume that such movies exist) have been killed so that someone would watch them die later. Here the consumption is a *completion* of the initial action. By "completion" I refer to a temporally extended action, in which the part of the action done in the past, foresaw and was predicated on an unspecified individual who will function in a particular way. By becoming that individual, one completes the action, making it whole (another way of articulating this thought, suggested to me by Stan Godlovitch, is that by consumption one is commissioning the killing). The snuff movie victim was not just killed; she was killed so as someone would watch her die later

⁶ This last point is shown in Herodotus' example in the *History of the Persian Wars* of a society repelled by the idea of burial, favoring instead the eating of the dead as a mark of respect for them. I see nothing immoral in changed cultural norms in which human remains are used in various ways, soap production included. Indeed, commodification of one's future corpse can be a good way to promote highly important goals, like enlarging the available reservoirs of organs for transplanting, thus greatly decreasing present suffering and death of living people. Some uses are disturbing or repulsive, and *given* such responses are then immoral; but the responses themselves rest on amoral conventions. We are attached to our bodies, and we care what happens to them after we die. This is a fact about present human psychology, and it has moral implications. But should we come to see this care as an irrational sentiment, there is nothing immoral about using bodies in ways that are less grand than organ transplants.

(analogously: the animal was not simply killed; it was killed so it would be worn or eaten later). These actions have an extended temporal structure, with a specified beginning with particular agents and victims, and a specified end with an undesignated agent, a structure that one fully particularizes when one chooses to become *that* undesignated agent.

The immorality of initiating such actions is greater than that of acting as their projected consumer not only because they involve the additional harm of motivating, initiating, and sometimes institutionalizing immoral practices that invite others in as performers of a wrong, but also because of the psychological fact that many can be consumers, but will be unable actually confront a suffering victim. But this way of looking at things—consumption not as distinct from the initial wrong, but as a carrying out of it—does bring out the sense in which consumption and killing are parts of the same wrong, regardless of the causal disconnection between consumption and the killing of the animal. And this dimension will be important later in this essay.

Apart from completing a temporally extended wrong through consumption, there is too, the conceptually distinct wrong of participating in a wrong practice, even when one's consumption does not increase suffering. Wearing human-bone rings is an appropriate example here, though in our context it conflates between several distinct kinds of harm, some of which do not apply in the animal case, so I shall avoid it. A better example is paying for services provided by child-prostituting establishment that exist in some countries. Doing so does not necessarily intensify the pain or harm done to the children involved. The potential client would only be one more indistinguishable client in the long day of the child being prostituted. One can even make a difference for the better: say, tipping generously or behaving nicer than other clients would. Morally avoiding such practices involves the sort of denied participation I am outlining, rather than assumptions regarding consequential change brought about through one's actions. But it is also distinct from the wrong involved in completing an immorality through consumption.

II

I have not yet explained why killing animals for food is wrong. My claim is so far this: *if* killing animals for food is a wrong, *personal* eating of these animals is wrong in both senses specified above: it is to complete the initial wrong done to the animal, and it is a participation in a wrong practice. This implies the following formulation of moral vegetarianism:

Animals should not be killed for food when nutritional alternatives are available. To eat animals is to participate in and to complete a morally wrong act.

Here are some clarifications of this definition and some non-trivial implications which follow from it ("non-trivial" in the sense that they may be contested by other moral vegetarians):

- a) The emphasis is on refraining from participation in a wrong done to an entity, where one's participation is not taken to be an intensification of the harm being done to that entity, but an endorsing of a wrong practice. The focus is on one's personal relation to what one eats. This definition does not rely on causal connections between vegetarianism and a reduction in the number of animals raised or killed for food. Nor is there an assumption that private vegetarianism will lead to collective vegetarianism or that vegetarianism is a causally effective type of protest against the wrongs of factory farming, as is assumed, for example, by demi-vegetarians (people who do not see anything wrong in killing animals for food, but are appalled by factory farming and so eat small quantities of meat thus protesting against current farming methods).
- b) No equality is assumed between the value of animal life and sufferings and the value of human being's lives and sufferings. This brand of moral vegetarianism does not require a prior belief that specieism is wrong or a belief in animal rights.
- c) This formulation of vegetarianism allows for eating and using animals that have not died from planned killing for the purpose of eating them. Some

vegetarians will disagree here (e.g. Cora Diamond). This position also says nothing against raising animals for food. While the vegetarianism I defend will avoid participating in current rearing practices as well, the position does not include a ban on raising animals for the purpose of eating them after they die on their own. While there are excellent culinary and prudential reasons to avoid what Sapontzis calls “scavenging”, I do not see a moral reason to do so. A more inviting possibility is using fur or leather products that depend on animals that have died on their own. There are no prudential reasons to avoid this, and no moral reasons to do so either.

- d) Vegetarianism thus construed does not entail veganism. The question of the morality of *any* use of animals for food products differs from use that involves killing them. While many uses of animals are wrong, unlike killing them, the very use of animals for eggs and dairy is not wrong as such. Using animals for these is consistent with their welfare, in the sense that they can lead comfortable and painless lives. Here commodification can actually work for animals rather than against them, as such creates financial incentives to preserve them.⁷ Since modern factory farming techniques for dairy and eggs are extremely cruel, participating in such practices is wrong too. But such ban on participation is different. First, this ban prescribes selective consumption, which still allows for consumption of egg and dairy products that are raised in morally acceptable ways. Second, avoiding egg and dairy because of the immoral production practices these rely on now, cannot be conceptualized in terms of avoiding completing or participating in a wrong in the same sense of the prostituted child or the killed animals example. No reform done to a child-prostituting establishment will justify participation.⁸
- e) Vegetarianism thus construed has no implications for the question of experimenting on animals or the question of product testing. Some experiments are wrong, and consuming products that stem from such

⁷ On commodifying animals as a benefit to them see R. A. Posner: “Animal Rights: Legal, Philosophical, and Pragmatic Perspectives”, forthcoming in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, Martha C. Nussbaum and Cass R. Sunstein eds.

⁸ For a detailed analysis and defense of this view, see my “Veganism”, forthcoming in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 35 (3): 367-379, 2004.

experiments is wrong since it is a participation and completion of a wrong. But the case for vegetarianism is morally distinct from the issues involved in experimentation because of available substitutes to *in vivo* testing: most scientists claim that virtually all experiments, right and morally dubious ones, require killing animals (though surely not the number of animals killed today) whereas full nutrition does not.⁹

III

But is killing animals for food wrong? It is usually thought that vegetarians need to prove a number of difficult claims so as to support their position. These include the claim that animals are not automata; that animals suffer or experience pain; that killing animals harms them; that killing or causing them pain matters to animals in a way that should make an ethical difference to us; that animals have some kind of moral status; that we have positive or negative obligations with regards to non-human animals or, more ambitiously, that animals have rights that in turn call for these negative/positive obligations. This way of framing the debate and its major steppingstones has a strong hold on the philosophical literature on vegetarianism. But it is a misleading framework. The superficiality resides in conflating between arguing about the justifications for beliefs that are widely shared, and arguing about the moral consequences implied by such beliefs given the fact that they are shared. The immorality of child-torture is, for example, predicated on a belief in the existence of other minds, the justification of which has been repeatedly contested. Yet since the belief in other minds is widely shared, the implication for moral action does not require a proof of this prior claim even if it happens to underlie it. By contrast, when the underlying beliefs are not shared, implications for action have to await a justification of these (e.g. implications for abortions largely depend on contested beliefs regarding the moral and ontological status of the foetus). Since philosophers like to justify regardless of the nature of the dispute, the distinction between these two types

⁹ Literature on alternatives to animal testing casts doubt on this (e.g. Greek C. R and Greek J. S. *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: The Human Cost of Experimenting on Animals*, 2000, Continuum: London and New York.). For my own position on this question, see my forthcoming "Killing for Knowledge".

of debates has faded within the vegetarian debate (that is, debates that depend on contested beliefs vs. debates that depend on shared beliefs which have contested justifications). This as well as the attempt to ground vegetarianism on a larger theory of animal welfare has led to adopting a misleading framework for this specific debate.

Distinguishing between beliefs held and beliefs proved can show where disagreements between vegetarians and their opponents lies. Virtually everyone, vegetarian or not, will agree that there are some moral restrictions on our relations with animals. Anti-cruelty legislation and ethical supervision on animal experimentation within research institutes are indicative of this shared consensus. Animals should not, for example, be tortured or even painlessly killed for an insubstantial reason (think of someone who purchases hundreds of healthy cats and dogs just for the purpose of euthanising them painlessly). Five non-trivial beliefs are implied by this shared condemnation, and it is important to note them as they are sometimes denied in this debate: first, a belief in a morally relevant difference between animals and objects: we are morally indifferent to people who slowly mince and shred their own furniture, smiling as they do so¹⁰; second, a belief in animal pain; third, a belief in the moral relevance of animal pain; fourth, a belief that there are cases in which such pain should trump even intense human pleasures; fifth, a belief that killing animals, painless or not, is a harm done to the killed animal, and that some justification for doing so is required.

Proving these beliefs is an important task. But disputants in the vegetarian debate make two mistakes: first they suppose that proving these is a burden that vegetarians need to carry alone. Second, that vegetarians need to carry it at all. Why prove beliefs that everyone shares anyway?¹¹ Here the philosopher's urge to examine the supposedly

¹⁰ Some objects, e.g. works of art, historical buildings or natural objects have a moral status too (moral status in the sense that there are moral restrictions regarding what may be done to them), though most theorists would agree that this status is anthropocentrically derived. Unlike animals, in the case of some objects some actions ought not be done because of respect to the concerns of actual or potential humans, not because they ought not be done to these objects. Nothing wrong is done *to* the object. Kant's attempt to apply this distinction to animals via his famous direct/indirect duties distinction in his *Lectures on Ethics* was predicated on an identification of animals with means for human welfare, a teleological view going back at least to Aquinas, which has no contemporary defenders. Advocates of a non-anthropocentric view of objects will disagree with my point here, but can still accept my general argument above.

¹¹ Note the difference between this argument and a similar one presented by Andrew Tardiff ("Simplifying the Case for Vegetarianism", *Social Theory and Practice*, 22. 3 (1996): 299-314): Tardiff attempts to use intuitions elicited from similar thought experiments so as to argue for vegetarianism. I am distinguishing between proving, or arguing for a belief, and showing that it is held. I share Tardiff's belief that the

obvious gets in the way of moral clarity. The philosophers who are interested in animals will work hard to prove say, why animal pain matters morally; they will in turn get challenged on these arguments by other philosophers, and the ensuing debate will create the false impression that the moral status of a contested aspect of the animal issue (here vegetarianism), *depends* on the validity of the proof of this anterior claim. Challenging a defender of vegetarianism to prove why painlessly killing an animal harms the animal, is as plausible as demanding of a feminist to solve the other minds problem. In one way both are reasonable requests: vegetarianism is predicated on a belief in the harm involved in animal death in much the same way that feminism is predicated on the assumption that other people exist. Philosophers are interested in the problematic basis for these latter assumptions. But at the same time these challenges are not to the point as proponents and opponents share the beliefs in question anyway, as is shown by the above thought experiments.

Justifying the condemnation of painless killing of animals is an important question, and I do not mean to shortcut it through this argument. My claim, up to this point, is not substantive but methodological (I am not, for example, claiming that accepting the above five beliefs necessitates adopting moral vegetarianism and will bring up that question only in part VI): *contesting* the justifications of beliefs is different from *rejecting* these beliefs. Put differently, the method I advocate does not rely on deciding the weighty matter of moral considerability (or “moral patienthood”) or rights for animals to establish vegetarianism. Instead, I appeal to coherence between existing beliefs held by virtually all readers of this essay, and then proceed to claim that eating meat does not cohere with them.¹²

vegetarian debate can and should be simplified, in the sense of detaching it from other issues and assumptions that literature on animal welfare focuses on. By focusing on the narrow case for vegetarianism I do not mean to criticize grander theories of moral considerability that also imply vegetarianism.

¹² Cf. Mark Rowlands’ method in *Animals Like Us*, Verso: London and New York (2002): 28-31. An honorary title for this strategy is “an appeal to moral integrity”. Fairness requires me to mention that the other name for such arguments is circumstantial *ad hominem*. The grand defense of employing such moves in philosophy is Johnstone’s: all philosophical arguments are of the circumstantial *ad hominem* kind (Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., *Validity and Rhetoric in Philosophical Argument: An Outlook in Transition*, University Park, PA: The Dialogue Press of Man & World, 1978). But relying on circumstantial *ad hominem* arguments is defensible through routes that are more mundane. The fact that many logic text-books classify such moves as “fallacies” means that like any non-formal fallacies (for example, appeal to authority), only some applications of such moves can be accepted (appealing to a friend’s authority when explaining why one takes a pill is implausible; appealing to a physicians authority is not). Aspects of the context usually

Given shared beliefs, one can examine whether one's conduct is continuous with the implications of these beliefs. Obviously, if someone actually *rejects* one or all of these beliefs (as opposed to contesting the justification of them), that will also amount to a rejection of vegetarianism. Deny that animals feel pain, and you are on your way to denying vegetarianism. Call this "anti-vegetarianism" as distinguished from "non-vegetarianism". An anti-vegetarian positively rejects one or more of these five assumptions above, while a non-vegetarian accepts them but does not see why they imply vegetarianism. These two opponents of vegetarianism should be distinguished from a third distinct opponent, which I shall call "the agnostic meat-eater". Unlike the anti-vegetarian, agnostic meat-eaters do not positively reject one of these fundamental assumptions, but, unlike non-vegetarians, do not accept them either. Theirs is the position of those who wait for the compelling argument that would persuade them that these beliefs are justified, and they see no reason to change their diet until such a justification is produced. Agnostic meat-eaters would charge vegetarians for holding (but not proving) basic beliefs that underlie their case, say, the belief that killing is a harm for the killed entity, or that pain is bad for the sufferer. While they do not deny these claims, and may even credit them with initial plausibility, the agnostic meat-eater would say that we cannot simply take the vegetarian's word vouching for the truth of these, and that an argument is therefore needed.

We now have a typology of dismissals of moral vegetarianism. Let us now evaluate them in turn. I shall argue that anti-vegetarians seldom exist (for good reason); that the agnostic meat eater relies on an argumentative trick; and that non-vegetarians—the more probable opponents of vegetarians—should change their diet, given the fact that they cannot rely on the argumentative moves of anti-vegetarians and agnostic meat-eaters.

IV

determine the legitimacy of such moves, and in the context of the vegetarian debate, I see nothing that makes the strategy flawed.

Anti-vegetarianism cannot be taken seriously. Disagreement exists as to what constitutes adequate justification, but as the euthanized puppies example shows, people do not believe that killing animals needs no justification whatsoever. It is also uncontested that some uses of animals constitute abuses of them and are to be prevented even when such prevention frustrates a strong human pleasure. Denying that animals feel pain (or that they are responding but unfeeling automata and are thus objects) has also become unpopular in post-Cartersian bioethics: animals limp on hurt limbs, respond to painful stimuli, have endorphin (even some worms have that) and respond to pain relieving medication. Saying that this is “instinct” rather than “pain” as we know it in its human articulated form, is implausible since first, it implies that babies’ responses to painful stimuli are also “instinctive” rather than morally relevant “pain”, and secondly, that human pain is divorced from the domain of instinct, and that something radically different is going on when humans and non-human animals are pricked by a needle.¹³ Anti-vegetarians would have to work hard to unsettle such convictions, and it is difficult to imagine how they can do so.

An anti-vegetarian might deny that killing animals harms them, especially if it is done painlessly, and that it is thus not a wrong requiring justification. This too militates against commonsense as the obligation to justify any killing of animals is shared across cultures, and is at least as old as the book of Genesis. The obligation to justify killing is shared even by critics of pro-animal literature (though they of course challenged the specific cases wherein killing animals is justified). It is consensual then, that killing animals for no good reason even if it is painless is wrong. Why? Proposed answers include appeal to the shared *intuition* that killing an animal is wrong (exemplified, for example, by avoiding stepping on animals);¹⁴ or appeals to the loss of their experiential opportunities; or to the deprivation of achieving their potential; or appeals to the principle of

¹³ There is a more plausible, selective version of this argument, which denies the pain of “lower” animals, regarding these as no more than automata. I do not see much of a difference between a chicken and a crab, either in terms of death-perception, or the capacity to feel pain (I have my doubts about oysters, which strike me as thoroughly vegetative beings). But I sympathize with the general tendency within pro-vegetarian literature to avoid fine-graining the argument, at least in this stage of the debate. For the evidence as to animal pain (including evidence for pain in “lower” animals) see DeGrazia, *ibid*, Ch. 5 and Bernard E. Rollin: *The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain and Science*, Oxford UP: Oxford (1989).

¹⁴ See Andrew Tardiff, “Simplifying the Case for Vegetarianism”, *Social Theory and Practice*, 22. 3 (1996): 299-314

minimizing the pain which is inevitably involved in killing; or appealing to the opportunity of minimizing harm even when that harm does not involve pain (after defending the idea that a being can be harmed even if it cannot conceptualize the harm as present or impending harm); or saying that whatever makes us see the painless killing of people as harm cannot be limited to humans when one tries to explain why the painless killing of humans is wrong; or by saying that killing an animal takes from it all that it has (regardless of how this affects the overall calculus of pleasure and pain, that is, whether the animal can be replaced by another experiencing animal); or by saying that might can't make right, and by appealing to fairness: that it is unfair that all you have is taken from you if this can be avoided.

Such answers have been mounted from different perspectives within pro-animal literature, and have been brought into conflict in the past since many pro-vegetarian authors disagree on the specific moral basis for diet reform. Since one goal of this essay is to show that vegetarianism need not be an outcome of broader considerations regarding the status of animals, I can afford to be eclectic here: unjustified killing of animals is wrong in all the senses above: it inevitably creates pain, it is an act of violence, it is probably wrong in many of the senses in which killing people for no substantial reason is wrong, it harms the animal by taking from it all that it has regardless of the pain it does or does not experience. Like other *prima facie* wrongs, this one too needs to be justified when it is done. Whether or not killing for food is a sufficient justification will be taken up later, but contesting the idea that killing animals harms them, as the anti-vegetarian claims, requires substantial arguments that can unsettle some very strong and widely shared conviction.

Someone can object here to my appeal to shared beliefs. Beliefs do not turn into truths when they are endorsed by a collective. This objection ignores the distinction I made between justifying claims and examining what follows from these claims assuming that they are held. Anti vegetarianism clashes with beliefs most of us hold. "Too bad for these beliefs" is a possible reply, but what does it mean in this context? Deny animal pain and you are there with pre-Darwinian bioethics. Dismiss pain's moral relevance and you join company with all kinds of sadists. Peter Carruthers is admirably consistent when he claims that torturing a cat when one is unperceived is morally unproblematic (his

example is of a scientist that leaves earth on a spaceship and tortures her cat). Swallowing this horrifying counter-intuitive outcome of his own version of a direct/indirect duties approach (rather than seeing it as a *reductio* of it) is Carruthers' own suggestion. Anti-vegetarians will have to endorse a strange position of this kind on pain of inconsistency. Claiming that entities are not harmed when they are painlessly killed is a sophism: if it is invalid in the case of humans, why should it work in the case of animals (unless "harm" is a species-dependent notion, but why should it be?¹⁵).

V

How about agnostic meat-eaters? In the context of a philosophical debate, their kind of objection sounds lethal: no philosopher wants to sound as if her fundamental premises descended on her from heaven and that their truth is guaranteed by the divine aura with which they are endowed. Philosophers are in the business of justification, and so a demand for justification is never inappropriate. On the other hand, how does one *argue* that, for example, pain is bad or harms the sufferer, or that if an entity can be made to suffer, then things matter to it? Frey, for example, denies that suffering is a sufficient condition for ascribing interests to an entity on the ground that no one has given an argument showing that this is so. Now it may seem clear as day that if an entity is in great pain it is in a state that it wants to avoid. Things obviously *matter* to this entity, and in this sense, it has an *interest* in the termination of the pain. Frey does not deny the vivacity of this belief; he simply wants an argument for it.¹⁶

This answer is a trick. The agnostic meat-eater forces his opponent into an area which is an embarrassing one for all moral philosophy. One would want an answer that does more than points out morally basic intuitions (in our case, the intuition that pain is bad), as these can conflict, have no probative value, lack explanatory force and tend to be morally conservative. Everyone concedes that justifications must end somewhere. But the attempt to perceive some actions as making up the sphere of the good or the bad, just like

¹⁵ Some have argued that interests are linguistic, hence frustrating interests can only be done to a human. Even if this is true, the notion of harm is broader than interference with interests (e.g. babies can be harmed even when they lack language).

¹⁶ R. G. Frey, *Interests and Rights: The Case Against Animals*, Clarendon Press: Oxford (1980), Ch. XI.

some color patches make up the sphere of what is designated by “yellow” (G. E. Moore’s analogy), involves a capacity for moral perception, an idea which was popular in the nineteenth century, but is no longer defended. So under the guise of requiring argument in the limited context of the vegetarian debate, the agnostic meat-eater is asking vegetarians to solve nothing less than the problem of basic beliefs in moral philosophy. Take for example, the belief that without some weighty justification, inflicting suffering is wrong. This judgment is “basic” in the sense that it is constitutive of the notion of wrong: if someone denies such a judgment, she either altogether lacks the concept of wrong, or is proposing a reform in ethics. But what is one to say if an argument in support of this judgment is required?

The position I find most plausible with regards to basic beliefs is sociological rather than argumentative: we are not *argued* into accepting the association between, say, unjustified inflicted suffering and wrong, but are socialized into it. We wish to avoid suffering ourselves. This affects our dealings with others, and directs us as to what they would wish to avoid or what they would perceive as harming them. Philosophers would typically not object to such a developmental account and to its systematization by a theory of moral development of one type or another (Kohlberg’s is the most empirically supported theory of moral development, and is consistent with this developmental account). But since someone can be socialized into Nazism too, philosophers would typically seek to avoid conflating between the descriptive and the normative accounts of moral development. Philosophers will ask for argumentative backing for such ground-level preferences. Yet do we really have *arguments* why infliction of suffering on others requires justification? It seems that our “argument” is no more than our preference not to live in this way. Preferring to live in this way has reasons, and is thus rationally better than living in a world in which inflicting suffering can be done without reason. But an argument showing that A is rationally preferable to B should not be confused with an argument showing that B is wrong, which is what, in effect, the agnostic meat eater is asking for.¹⁷

¹⁷ A sociological explanation of this sort is philosophically disappointing, as it appears to replace argumentative justification with an explanation of genesis. Yet combing the classical ethical writings regarding basic beliefs does not yield better moves. Aristotle, Bentham, and Mill thought that some pains are bad or that some pleasures are good not through argument, but simply by virtue of these being objects

I specified five widely shared beliefs regarding animals: the belief that killing them with no good reason even if this is painless is wrong; that they can experience pain; that their pain is morally relevant; that our dealings with them is morally different than our dealings with most objects; that their suffering should sometimes trump intense human pleasure. Denying these beliefs, as the anti-vegetarian does, is implausible. Agnostic meat-eaters ask for arguments for these beliefs before they would change their diet. The philosophically broad answer to this challenge is an argument for moral considerability of the type produced by Cavalieri, Regan, Bernstein and others.¹⁸ I am defending a narrower answer here: There is something basic and underived in repulsion felt to someone torturing an animal. This reaction has little to do with rights that the animal does or does not have (nor do I think that the repulsion to someone torturing a child is primarily about an infringement of rights). Each of the five beliefs is basic in this sense. Against the agnostic meat-eater I am claiming that asking for argumentative backing here is as plausible as asking for arguments in support of the belief that pain is (usually) bad. Agnostic meat-eating is an argumentative trick in this sense: it asks for arguments for beliefs that are reached through more immediate inputs. It can function as a reasonable critique of vegetarianism only if it makes sense to raise the problematic nature of basic moral beliefs in any area of applied ethics and proposed moral reform.

of positive or negative desire (this, as Bentham recognized, does not shut the door to animals). Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative—asking whether one wants to live in a world in which a certain practice is universalized—also appeals to basic unjustified preferences rather than to arguments. Moral philosophers do not like to admit that elaborate theories rest on conceptually basic desires or preferences. Many ethicists today lean to the Rawlsian approach to intuitions—we begin *media res*, with potentially replaceable considered judgments—and this already concedes that we have no better starting point than some conceptually primitive connections. Alternatively, one can try to resist intuitions altogether, in the manner of R. M. Hare. But even Hare does not manage to escape them (for example, he does not explain the positive value of preference satisfaction—the basic notion of his theory—holding it to be some observable given, like the way in which Mill or Aristotle relate to the pursuit of happiness. But what would distinguish in an informative way between observable givens and intuitions?) To pretend that we have, or must have, a better procedure else we promote an irrational morality is superficial, since it presumes that Utilitarians, Kantians, or Contractarians have somehow solved the basic belief problem and have managed to avoid intuitions (which they did not). A complaint of this kind is also insensitive to the various sifting that goes on with relation to basic moral inputs. Sifting prevents a crude foundationalism regarding intuitions (a “if you are strongly for/against it, you must be right” view).

¹⁸ Cavalieri P. *The Animal Question: Why Nonhuman Animals Deserve Human Rights*, C. Woollard Trans. 2001, Oxford UP: New York; Bernstein, M. H. *On Moral Considerability: An Essay on Who Morally Matters*, 1998, Oxford: Oxford UP; Regan, T. *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

VI

If my argument so far is sound, non-vegetarianism should be the genuine position that a thoughtful opponent of moral vegetarianism should endorse. Non-vegetarians, I claimed, are those who opposes torturing animals and who would condemn euthanizing healthy animals for no reason. I claimed that these necessarily endorse the five beliefs above, and that therefore the important question between vegetarians and their opponents is not whether or not these beliefs are justified, but whether they imply that killing animals for food is wrong. So after discarding the objections of anti-vegetarians and the agnostic meat-eater, we can finally take on this question: is killing animals for food wrong, given these shared assumptions?

Evaluating the morality of killing animals for food begins then by breaking up “food” into its two components: nutrition and pleasure. Wide agreement exists as to the ability to have a fully nutritious vegetarian diet. Wide agreement exists as to the inability of such diet to compete with the culinary pleasure afforded by a non-vegetarian diet. This clarifies the moral issue, which is no longer the moral status of killing animals *for food*, but killing animals for the unique and irreplaceable culinary pleasure that eating them affords. In his *Animal Rights and Wrongs*, Roger Scruton draws a distinction that avoids the unpleasant sound that killing for pleasure has (he is discussing angling), saying that one does not kill for fun (which connotes sadism), but that the killing is the price of fun.¹⁹ Scruton’s point is a good one: angling, hunting, or eating animal flesh are not sadistic. And this is why the description I choose is “killing for pleasure”, rather than “killing for sadistic pleasure”.

Let us begin with pleasure. The distinct, irreplaceable, and at times intense pleasure of eating animal flesh need not be denied. Animal flesh not only opens up numerous culinary possibilities, but also functions as a focus of many kinds of social and religious activities like the outdoor barbecue and the Christmas turkey. All such pleasures are denied to vegetarians, who instead become social spoilsports who force non-vegetarians to change the traditional character of some of these. Some vegetarians will say that in

¹⁹ Metro Books: London, (third edition) 2000, p. 119.

their own internal hedonistic calculus, these losses are balanced against a new kind of pleasure, involving a sense of moral completeness and perhaps even purity that comes with doing the right thing.²⁰ Yet for other vegetarians (such as myself) such talk is too abstract, and their moral choice is experienced as a downright loss. Personally, I am even put off by vegetarians that seem to never have had much of a zeal for eating meat, and lose sympathy when I read passages in the writings of moral vegetarians in which “vegetarian cuisine” is praised over its immoral alternative. The unhedonistic (and therefore humanly narrow) perspective regarding the meaning of eating that sometimes animates such writings—R. M. Hare admits that he and his wife hardly eat out and so his demi-vegetarianism is not difficult for him—alienates vegetarians such as myself, who have had very intense experiences in eating (as well as cooking) meat, and thus experience their own moral choice as extracting a high price indeed.

Does the harm involved in killing animals trump such loss? The superficial way of framing this question is in terms of moral values as opposed to pleasures. The superficiality rests on the way by which casting the question in this way plays into the hands of the vegetarian. Since pursuing moral values typically involves curtailing pleasures or the pursuit of pleasures, highlighting the pleasures of eating animal flesh is simply beside the point: a case for moral vegetarianism need not be required to show that vegetarianism is the happiest or most pleasurable way to live, but that it is the moral way to do so even if it does prescribe tough limitations. People who justify eating animal flesh through saying that the pleasure this gives them overrides the wrong done to animals have, in effect, conceded the moral claims of the vegetarians.

The deeper way of framing the question is not in terms of a value-pleasure opposition, but in terms of conflicting values. Pleasures are not necessarily distinct from values. Some pleasures are goods, the pursuit of which is a value. Culinary values need not be moral values. But they still need to be considered as values (rather than pleasures) that compete with the value of avoiding eating animal flesh. Commensurating pleasures and

²⁰ Here is, for example, Mohandas Gandhi: “...there is something much higher which calls us to vegetarianism...I would just emphasize the moral basis of vegetarianism. And I would say that I have found from my own experience, and the experience of thousands of friends and companions, that they find satisfaction, so far as vegetarianism is concerned, from the moral basis they have chosen for sustaining vegetarianism.” From “Diet and Morality” in *Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer*, K. S. Walters and L. Portmess (Ed), S.U.N.Y. Press: Albany, 1999, p.144.

deprivations (or balancing pleasures against values or values against conflicting values) is notoriously difficult to explicate. We daily make such evaluations on a private as well as institutional level without a unified theory regarding how we do this. When they are questioned, our preferences ultimately lack probative force. Avoiding killing humans for fun is today a trivial judgment in which one compares values and pleasures. Gladiator-fighting shows that people did appear to take pleasure in fights to the death. Can this pleasure of many be trumped by the value of the lives of gladiators? A contemporary would say that it can, and that no pleasure or aggregate pleasure of this kind justifies the death of another. Such pleasures are immoral and what is not immoral in their pursuit can be replaced by non-deadly sports. Suppose now, that a hypothetical defender of fights to the death would deny that such substitutes provide the same intense pleasure that fights to the death involve (the analogy to the vegetarian issue being claims of the “Nothing done to tofu will compete with a juicy steak” sort). We cannot simply demand that he give up his pleasure, if he challenges us to explain why the death involved in the practices he loves overrides the pleasures of many. We can appeal to notions like rights or the sanctity of life. But these make no sense in a non-egalitarian setting and will strike him as dubious and forced innovations. His judgments will probably resemble those who today reject the applications of notions like rights to animals. The argument would probably stop there.

This impasse shows that comparative judgments as to conflicting values or goods lack probative force, and that they spring from a rich matrix of sensitivities that do not exist universally. Rejecting the moral status of gladiator fighting from a contemporary perspective is much easier than doing so from within a cultural outlook that has not yet devised an egalitarian outlook and the sensitivity to importance of human life. But this is a practical difference. On the level of rational debate the impasse is as fierce. What can one *say* to a defender of fights to the death? What constitutes a good argument showing that the pleasure of such sports cannot outweigh the harm they involve? We reach foundational issues in ethics: the probative status of evaluations; their convention-related status vs. a possible trans-convention implicit structure from which they emerge; whether persuading a radical dissenter is a plausible test for a moral position; what constitutes proof in ethics; the possible justification for reforming present practices and sentiments. I will not plunge into these. Analogous past cases in which curtailing benefits and

pleasures from one large group of entities because such involves overwhelming harm to another group, did not proceed from discovering a solution to the foundational problems of ethics. Egalitarian social movements succeed primarily due to numerous pragmatic contingencies. Their moral case is substantiated through tapping on to sentiments that sometimes need to be created, until the claims they make turn from idiosyncratic preaching into vivid and action guiding prescriptions. Vegetarianism is in the same boat as pre-nineteenth century feminism or early eighteenth century abolitionism: the sentiments that can change the preferences within the privileged group so that the harm done will be perceived as overwhelming in relation to the benefits gained are non-existent or weak.

The upshot of all this is that one cannot *prove* that killing animals for the pleasure involved in eating them is wrong. One can show that killing vs. pleasure is the actual equation. One can then point to the continuity between vegetarianism and other social causes that we typically regard as encapsulating and promoting moral progress, in which overwhelming harm justifies limiting pleasures.²¹ And yet, there is one advance I think we can make given this paper's emphasis on participation in my proposed formulation of moral vegetarianism. The focus on participation forces the non-vegetarian to think of *each act* of eating animal flesh as participation in one application of the killing-vs.-pleasure equation, with reference to a particular animal's death and a particular pleasure this involves. Most meals are uneventful, they may be pleasurable but do not involve *intense* pleasure, yet do involve animal death. When eating is regarded as a form of participation, it becomes psychologically and morally harder to defend regular mundane animal flesh eating. As for overwhelmingly pleasurable acts of animal flesh eating, here

²¹ It is many times noted that pro-animal literature appeals to similarities between liberating animals and egalitarian social movements. Early writings in the modern version of the pro-animal movement in the Seventies have done much to press the analogy here (Ryder and Singer on speciesism are the best examples). Note that the argument over this analogy has several layers: first, an egalitarian outlook has little to do with the empirical fact of an actual equality in capacity between the privileged and non-privileged class. Second, systematic bias against a class of entities usually depends on erroneously regarding a difference between the entities to have moral significance. Third (the point I am making above), a concern for justice in these cases, always carries a price, a curtailment of certain pleasures within the privileged class. For a detailed defense of the idea that reforming animal related practices cannot and need not be proved, rather, it is to be predicated on such reform being continuous with other moral concerns, such as fairness, minimizing suffering, and developing a better character, see S. F. Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals*, Temple UP: Philadelphia, 1987.

things depend on the psychological clarity of the equation: vegetarians are just more vividly aware of the animal-death side of it.

VII

Leahy, Scruton and Hare have argued that collective vegetarianism involves the inexistence of billions of potential animals and the possible extinction of species that would not exist if there will be no financial incentive to breed them.²² This argument is often used in conversation; the attempt being to embarrass the vegetarian into admitting that the opponent's eating practices are a positive good to the killed animals thus reversing the moral poles of the debate. If collective vegetarianism is bad for animals, then personal vegetarianism which appeals to the immorality of killing for eating (rather than only a protest against modalities of rearing and killing) is counterproductive from the stand point of animals, and is thus predicated on the wrong ideal and is to be dismissed. Call this the eating-animals-benefits-them argument, or EABT for short. Here is Hare's version of EABT:

From the point of view of such a [roughly utilitarian] theory it would seem that the issue about *killing* animals, as distinct from causing them suffering, resolves itself into, not the question of whether it is all right to kill animals, but the question of how many lives animals, of different species including the human, we ought to cause there to be...What we ought to be doing is to maximize the amount of quality-adjusted life years...of sentient beings. And I do not believe that we should be doing this if we refrained from eating animals. The reason is that if we gave up eating animals the market for meat would vanish, and no more animals would be raised for meat-production...This thought gives me pause when I walk in the fields around my home in England and see a great many apparently happy animals, all destined to be eventually eaten...In our village there is also a trout farm. The fish start their lives in moderately commodious ponds and have what I guess is a pleasant life for fish, with plenty to eat. In due course they are lifted out in buckets and put immediately into tanks in the farm buildings. Purchasers select their fish, which is then killed by being banded smartly on the head and handed to the customer. I am fairly certain that, if

²² Leahy, M. P. T, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective*, Routledge: London & New York (1991): 210). R. M. Hare: "Why I am Only a Demi-Vegetarian", *Essays on Bioethics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1993) 219-236; Scruton *ibid*.

given the choice, I would prefer the life, all told, of such a fish to that of almost any fish in the wild, and to non-existence.²³

I cite this argument at length, because it convinces many philosophers. Hare is actually running together two distinct questions: the first involves the benefits of being raised for food from the standpoint of the animal in comparison to non-existence (conceived of both on the level of the individual animal being killed, and the level of entire species which would not exist without human interest). The second relates to killing by human hand, which can be better for the animal than “natural” death.

Let us begin with being killed by humans (as opposed to being brought into existence by humans and then killed by them). This argument is sometimes made with regards to hunting: it is said that the hunted animal is better off being killed by hunters or their dogs than the kinds of death that await it in the wild. This version of EABT is a pretense. Hare is not saying that killing the trout is a benefit for it *now*. Being “smartly” clubbed is obviously not in the interest of the trout (as Hare is imagining a healthy trout; not one which is in pain, or dying through other harsh means, or is about to be eaten by an impending larger fish). An already existing animal has an obvious interest to prolong its life, assuming it is healthy and not suffering from some other cause, and so killing cannot be a benefit for it. So the killing itself is rarely a benefit, and when one fleshes out a case for a killing which is a genuine benefit to the animal, one reaches criteria resembling those of euthonized pets which are mostly killed for their own good. In fact, since humans are highly successful voluntary predators—“voluntary” in the sense that they do not have to hunt foxes or fish—these creatures would be relieved to hear that such hunting is eliminated, and that they have so many less predators to worry about (recall that EABT asks us to hypothesize regarding what benefits animals).

But Hare’s argument with regards to the fish is somewhat different: being raised and killed for human consumption makes for an *overall better life* for the trout than being a fish in the wild, or simply a non existing fish. This is the more popular version of EABT.

²³ Ibid, 227-8. Pro-animal literature did not fail to mention the structural similarity of such claims to past justifications of slavery: “[The abolition of slavery] would be extreme cruelty to the African savages, a potion of whom it saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life.” Citation ascribed to James Boswell, and is given in M. Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, Mirror Books: USA (1996): 73.

Against this one can obviously challenge the plausibility of arguing from the relative good of non-existent entities. But I shall avoid this line and assume that it makes sense to say that an entity benefits from being brought into existence. Vegetarians deal with it through analogous thought experiments with regards to potential humans which will be victimized through practices that would, at the same time, bring them into existence. If these analogies are valid, the vegetarian reply is a refutation of EABT. This is because with regards to humans, the benefits of being created cannot justify a practice in which one is created so as to be a victim. We would have no problem judging immoral a pedophilic society that brings some children to the world with the specific purpose of sexually exploiting them—providing them with otherwise pleasant living conditions—and then killing them painlessly when they mature and lose their sexual appeal, justifying the exploitation and killing through the benefits of being born; banning a reform on the pretense that it would prescribe non-existence to these children. Or consider human cloning for the purpose of creating people that live pleasant and short lives, functioning as organ banks that would not exist without this purpose. These practices will not get justified through an appeal to the benefits of creating the victims from the perspective of these victims.

An advocate of EABT will either drop EABT as plausible justification, or say that there is a disanalogy between human and non-human animals. The claim being that human life has a different kind of value, and the considerations that go into killing people are different than those that are operative in the case of animals and so the justification does not carry over from non-human animals to human animals. The defender of EABT now turns out to be saying that given the different kind of value that animal life has, the benefits of being born justify taking its life later. This position does not deny that it is in the interest of potential exploited children or cloned people to be born rather than not to exist (assuming, again, that such comparative judgements make sense). Yet it holds that unlike animal life, the value of human life is irreducible to this interest.

Dissociating interest and value in this way is perhaps what is meant by the attribution of “sacredness” to human life. The secular rendering of sacredness is that the value of human life is non-instrumental: it does not reside in life being just a means for opportunities, experiences, or actualizing one’s potential. And so the defender of EABT

appears to hold that the value of human life is not only distinct, but also overrides all these other ends in the sense that some positive experiences and some actualization of one's potential will not justify existence. The defender of EABT will then go on to say that animals' lives are different. They are not sacred, and do have mere instrumental value. Unfortunately, all this leads the defender of EABT to a weird result. The inferior and instrumental value of animal life gets potential animals some benefits over less fortunate potential human animals: animals get to exist, flourish and die whereas potential humans are so valuable that they can't exist at all.

This outcome is surprising; but one can still accept it. Being special has its limitations and not existing, even when such existence is in one's interest, is one of them. But the strange result calls for thoughts about the valuation of life that lead to it. The thought experiments above could be construed in ways that turn the lives of potential exploited children or cloned organ donors into partly pleasant ones. Since such practices do benefit their potential victims, explicating what is morally wrong with them relates to the ambivalence of "worth": short of extreme scenarios, most lives are worth living from the perspective of the potential beings who will live them since some positive experiential value overrides no value. At the same time life's value is not decided solely through this internal perspective. Virtually all lives are *worth* living; yet, some lives *should not* be lived. This dual evaluation of life's value is not limited to humans, as no one holds that it is justified to bring animals to the world so as to torture them to death after they lead several years of pleasant living. Raising animals for food need not be similar to torturing them. But the torture analogy shows that it is not enough to point out the prudential benefit a practice has for the purpose of its evaluation, as evaluation involves a second, qualitative component which EABT leaves out. When the dual aspect of life's evaluation is recognized, it is no longer sufficient to point out the benefit of living from the standpoint of the animal. This undermines the EABT argument, which rests on prudential considerations alone.²⁴

²⁴ In my "Veganism" (see note 8 above) I enter further into the considerations that determine life's value. Briefly, apart from the quantitative and qualitative dimensions (that is, whether a life is or is not lived and its quality) I specify a teleological dimension: that is, some qualitatively reasonable lives should not be lived, as some ends for lives that are lived pervert or present a mis-recognition regarding what having a life means.

The problems of employing EABT do not end there. EABT also prescribes a too conservative stance with regards to factory farming, a stance which Hare and Scruton would not like to adopt since both would like to see factory farms reformed. By reducing to a minimum the price of raising animals and thus making meat cheaper and affordable for many consumers, factory farms enable many more animals to exist than the number of animals got through traditional farming. Stop factory farming or substantially reform the animals' quality of life, and you diminish the number of existing animals, probably by millions. Factory farming prescribes harsh lives for animals; though it is somewhat better than, say, a life of non-stop torture and is surely better than nothing. An obtuse owner of a factory farm would use EABT not only to justify eating meat, but also to prevent qualitative reform involving reduction of animal suffering: the claim will be that any such reduction in suffering is uneconomical and so would lead to reduction of many lives of potential animals (consider the financial implications of requiring that laying hens have more room to move around in large scale poultry farming). If eating animals benefits them, then raising them in the most financially efficient way is in their favor too. It is even possible that the quality of living in such factories should be *reduced*, thus enabling even more animals to exist (preventing any movement at all for chickens rather than just limiting their movement severely may enable such factories to double or triple the amount of living chickens). No philosopher who has taken the trouble to examine the particularities of factory farming accepts this conclusion.²⁵

Aside from this, EABT also has an interesting flip-side: if killing animals for food and eating them is truly held to be a benefit to these animals because such practice brings them into existence, the inverse holds too: animals which can thrive without humans breeding them, say, fish, should not be eaten as such killing has nothing to do with their benefit. The same holds for cows and hens which would still exist in large numbers even if they are not killed for food as the incentive to raise them for eggs and milk will preserve them in large numbers. And so this objection to vegetarianism actually goes some way in furthering the aims of moral vegetarians, and these implications should be

²⁵ Hare, it is true, is speaking of "quality adjusted life years" not simply of existence. But the obtuse farmer I am imagining will say that a hen's life in a crowded cage is better than no life, and since Hare is not explicating how negative quality is to be weighed against the benefits of existence it is not clear how Hare can respond.

pointed out whenever the argument is used in a genuine way rather than a mean for annoying vegetarians.

VIII

EABT aside, we still need to face the question of the desirability of a vegetarian utopia from the standpoint of animals. Suppose that farm animal husbandry is reformed, that factory farming is abolished, that animals are only killed for their own benefit or when they endanger people. Suppose that laying hens are still raised for eggs, cows for milk, and that all such animals are raised in non-crowded farms which are encouraged to invest in raising these animals for these products, but are also supervised by independent officials that are in charge of the welfare of the animals (rather than veterinarians that are paid by the farmers). Such animals are killed only when they are old, wounded, or ill, and in some cases are then eaten or sold as food; their bodies used for the production of numerous products like leather or pet food. There is nothing so far immoral in such a world. But what prospects does such world hold for bulls, male chicks, or hogs in general, which have no such “goods” to deliver, and which are today not raised at all (in the case of virtually all male chicks which are killed upon birth) or are raised only for their flesh (as are the calf and the pig)?

Presenting in detail a vegetarian ideal is a theoretical challenge; not a practical one. The question is whether vegetarian theory is flawed since it is predicated on an ideal which is a bad one for some farm animals (there might come a time where the question becomes a practical one, but for us the question is merely theoretical). Is collective vegetarianism bad for some animals? One possible answer is that if the choice is between exploiting some animals and the non-existence of these animals, a moral world should opt for the latter, and that the vegetarian ideal world will not inhabit any of these animals: the cow, the pig and the chicken will follow the dodo. But milder solutions are possible. Selective artificial insemination can solve some problems—at least for poultry and cattle—by the time that collective vegetarianism will pose a real “threat”, should that time ever come. Artificial insemination is widely practiced today with regards to cattle and turkey, and more recently made possible in chickens. Semen differentiation as part of

these practices is not technologically inconceivable (it exists for humans), and would solve the moral problems involved in the birth of “unproductive” males while preserving the species. Short of this, vegetarian legislation, should that ever happen, can make the killing of “non-productive” animals illegal, and require that the cost of raising them along with their “more productive” sisters be shared by the consumers of eggs, milk, leather and wool. Indeed, such “compensation” to these animals—conceived of as kinds rather than individuals—can morally justify the use to which they are put and answer the moral worries of vegans: without eggs, milk and posthumous use of their bodies these animals along with their many brothers (in the case of chickens, more than half of chicks are “useless” males) would not exist at all.

The vegetarian utopia’s real problem (and somewhat ironic in the case of a paper written by a Jew) is with pigs. Negative ecological consequences of setting some pigs free at various points in the planet and letting them have their opportunity of surviving as a wild species may outweigh the envisaged benefits, even if this option is at all feasible. Keeping the species alive through confining some of them in zoos is a solution only under the assumption that zoos themselves are morally justified institutions. Recent literature toys with the idea of “positive obligations” or “negative responsibility” to animals, the idea being a duty to benefit animals rather than focusing on the obligation not to harm them.²⁶ Such ideas may base an obligation to save an endangered species, especially one that, like pigs, has been heavily exploited. Of course, conceiving of such degrees of charitable behavior in a world where human lives, misery, illness and poverty are routinely ignored is a fantasy, but again, the issue is theoretical; not practical, and the thoughts on positive obligation do point to a solution, in which it will be the responsibility of humans to create conditions that allow pigs to somehow survive. Pigs present the same moral problem as do lab mice that remain healthy after they have been experimented on, and are today killed by the thousands since they lose their ability to be used for further experimentation. One cannot ask scientists to set these free in “the wild”. Yet we can probably do better than gas healthy mice in Co2 tanks, as is routinely done now.

²⁶ David DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status*, Cambridge UP, 1996, pp. 272-278; Martha Nussbaum, “Animal Rights: The Need for a Theoretical Basis”, *Harvard Law Review*, 114. 5 (2001): 1506-1549.

Collective vegetarianism will not involve extinction to species that are exploited today. The cow, chicken and pig will exist. The reduction in number in some of these species would only correct the artificial growth in the number of lives that should not be lived, and are lived now. This artificial growth is the outcome of systematic, objectifying human exploitation that is such an ordinary fact of our surroundings that it requires an effort to be perceived. It is our business to correct this, and it is in our capacity to do so.